



DATCP Staying Consumer Focused Into 2012

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MADISON – The Division Administrator of Trade and Consumer Protection Sandy Chalmers issued this end-of-the year message today:

Knowledge is power and the knowledge offered by the Trade and Consumer Protection Division gives consumers the power to identify, stop and avoid fraud.

As part of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP), the division's top priority in 2011 has been educating consumers on how they can protect themselves from identify theft, scams and unscrupulous business practices. We will build on that and try to reach even more people in 2012.

Identity theft is now the top consumer complaint at the Federal Trade Commission. Our Office of Privacy Protection works closely with local law enforcement, educating on identity theft and privacy issues. We also work with victims of identity theft to restore their credit, get money back and return their identity.

We don't have 2011 totals yet but in 2010, we received more than 150,000 calls, e-mails, and questions from Wisconsin consumers and businesses through our toll-free consumer hotline and website. We mediate consumer complaints of unfair and unlawful treatment, working as a liaison between consumer and business to resolve issues.

Our most popular and well-known program is the No Call List, a list of residential phone numbers of state residents who do not want to be called by telemarketers in their homes. In 2011, No-Call registrations hit an all-time high, with 2.3 million numbers. Cell phone numbers now make up 52 percent of the numbers on the list. This past year, working with the Wisconsin Department of Justice, we were able to reach the largest No-Call settlement in the history of the program. We'll be working even harder in 2012 to educate more people on how they can stop those telemarketing calls.

Another part of Consumer Protection's core mission is to ensure free and fair competition. We regulate industries to prevent unfair, deceptive business practices. We administer rules that apply to direct marketers (including telemarketers), telecommunications subscription and billing practices, rental housing, mail order and internet sales, motor vehicle repairs and home improvement.

The people who work in Consumer Protection are dedicated to making sure buyers get what they pay for and ensure fair competition by administering weights and measures laws. We check the accuracy of price scanners, gas pumps, package weights and scales across the state.

We work hard to alert as many consumers as possible to signs of fraud and deception, especially as new scams emerge. We use the Internet to reach hundreds of thousands of consumers and businesses quickly, simply, and at low cost. We also provide consumer tips for Spanish and Hmong-speaking residents. And now we can reach even more people through Facebook (www.facebook.com/widatcp) and Twitter (<http://twitter.com/widatcp>) including a younger segment of the population who are the most frequent victims of consumer fraud.

Looking ahead to 2012, we are working on a replacement complaint tracking system that will allow us to more effectively spot trends, identify emerging scams, target the most serious consumer fraud, easily share data with our partners, and coordinate enforcement efforts. We will continue to stay focused on our core duties of protecting consumers and maintaining a fair marketplace for the buyer and seller.

We encourage consumers to ask questions and report possible scams so they don't become a victim. The information and complaints you provide help us reduce unfair and deceptive practices. Contact DATCP by visiting datcp.wisconsin.gov, e-mailing datcp@wisconsin.gov or calling toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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